

# Luzerne County Ranks High in State for Vaccine Distribution

Published in the Citizen's Voice

By Steve Mocarsky Staff Writer

**March 5, 2021**

Luzerne County ranks sixth among the state's 67 counties for the number of COVID-19 vaccine doses supplied to providers here, but it comes in 10th when comparing counties based on their population.

A total of 122,090 doses of COVID-19 vaccines were distributed to providers in Luzerne County over the past 12 weeks, which equates to 385 doses distributed per 1,000 residents, given an estimated county population of 317,417, according to state Department of Health data, which omits doses supplied to several pharmacy and supermarket chains.

Philadelphia received the most vaccine in that time frame — 343,480 doses, or 217 doses for every 1,000 residents. Philadelphia is the most populous county in the state, while Luzerne is 12th in population.

The state allocates vaccines based on several factors including: the current allocations of vaccine, the amount of vaccine on hand for distribution, the amount already administered, population, population over 65, percent of the population that tested positive and the death rate.

Deputy Press Secretary Maggi Barton cautioned that focusing on the amount of vaccine distributed per county doesn't give an accurate picture of where the vaccines are

administered because providers based in one county may distribute doses in several counties.

For example, providers in Montour County, with a population of only 18,230, received 59,145 doses of vaccine, amounting to a whopping 3,244 doses of vaccine distributed there for every 1,000 county residents. But Geisinger Medical Center in Danville is a major provider hub in the county.

Matt Mattei, spokesman for Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center in Plains Twp., said Geisinger has four community vaccination centers in the state, and those vaccination centers can receive vaccines from more than one of the six Geisinger hospitals listed with the state as vaccine providers.

## Focus on the dashboard

Barton said it's important to look at the vaccine dashboard on the department's website, which she said reflects the number of residents to whom vaccines have been administered by their county of residence.

Luzerne County ranks 12th in the state for the percentage of residents vaccinated, according to data posted to the dashboard. With 28,617 residents partially vaccinated as of Thursday and another 30,999 fully vaccinated, 188 out of every 1,000 Luzerne County residents have had at least one of the two recommended vaccine doses.

In addition to being the top recipient of vaccines distributed in the state, Montour County also ranked first in the state for the percentage of residents who received vaccinations, with 360 out of every 1,000 county residents either partially or fully vaccinated.

Of the six Northeast Pennsylvania counties, Lackawanna fared better than Luzerne for vaccinations, ranking sixth in the state with 220 of every 1,000 residents having received at least one COVID-19 vaccination.

Wayne and Wyoming counties made the top 30, with 156 and 152 people vaccinated, respectively, for every 1,000 residents. Monroe, Pike and Susquehanna counties have only between 90 and 122 of every 1,000 residents at least partially vaccinated.

It's important to keep in mind that vaccine distribution data provided by the state does not include vaccines distributed to nursing homes and other long-term care facilities at a county level, but the number of vaccinations listed for each county on the department's vaccine dashboard does include vaccinations administered at nursing homes and long-term care facilities.

Vaccines distributed to a handful of providers in the state, such as Rite Aid, Wegmans, Weis Markets and Redner's, were omitted from this analysis because complete vaccine distribution data for them was not immediately available from the health department. The department only has the most recent week's distribution data posted for those providers.

## Manager's perspective

After reviewing the data behind Luzerne County's rankings, county Manager David Pedri noted that the county has three major medical providers — Lehigh Valley Hospital Network, Commonwealth Health and Geisinger — as well as the Wilkes-Barre Department of Health distributing vaccine.

"I'm not sure if other counties have that strong of a medical presence," Pedri said.

Pedri also noted two other factors that likely placed it in or around the top 10 for vaccine distribution and vaccinations — an aging population and a positivity rate that's remained consistent, "carrying around 60 new cases a day."

"Despite our perceived success here, I believe we have a lot more work to do, and we will continue to provide the support needed so that each person who wants to be vaccinated gets the opportunity to get a shot soon. We have over 320,000 citizens and

our Area Agency on Aging fields calls daily from our seniors who are seeking appointments,” Pedri said.

“My hope is that Northeastern Pennsylvania will be granted a mass vaccination site over the next few months to address the needs and demands of our community,” he said.